# PROSPECT;

OR

## *VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.*

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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### *Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 8.*

IT is impoſsible for any man to examine with attention this book, and not ſee in the character of the Jewiſh God various imperfections, and in many caſes the most complete and abſolute impotence. He frequently employs means which are not competent to produce the deſired effect; means and ends are not well adjusted, and this circumstance always marks any character with the most degrading deficiency of diſcernment. The choſen people of Jehovah were under the tyranny of the Egyptian king. Moſes and his God combined their strength for their emancipation, but Pharaoh oppoſed their deſigns, and having his heart often hardened either by the God of the Jews or by his own exertion, he ſeemed to triumph over the diverſified efforts which the choſen band made to accomplish their eſcape. It is very extraordinary that any believer in revelation can be so stupidly ignorant of the real character of that eternal being by whom the univerſe is governed, as to imagine that the god of Moſes is a real and not a fictitious divinity. What are all the kings and tyrants of the world when placed in the balance against ſupreme wiſdom, and the infinite perfections of the Creator himself. Superstitious deluſion may play off her tricks upon mankind, and triumph for ſome little time longer over the ignorance of man; but the period approaches when the conjurations of Moſes and the ſcandalous deſcriptions of his god, will be placed in humble prostration before the throne of reaſon, and remain for

ever in a state of silence and contempt. This chapter opens with an extraordinary account of an army of frogs which were sent by Jehovah to invade the Egyptian king, and infest the habitations of his subjects. The account is as follows, (verse 2d and 3d) "And if those refuse to let my people go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs. And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bed-chamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneading troughs." This is one effort of the Jewish divinity to frighten Pharaoh into his duty; but it did not answer the purpose, he remained inflexible, and obstinately bent upon holding in bondage the chosen favourites of heaven. The enquiry may well be made of all believers in revelation, why did God send this vast number of frogs when he knew it would answer no valuable purpose whatever? Is it consistent with infinite wisdom to employ means destined to produce only a disagreeable failure in regard to the intended effect? Certainly not; but further efforts of a similar nature are still made, as we shall see by advancing further in this chapter. But previous to this it is necessary to remark that this miracle of the frogs, said to have been performed by Aron, through the assistance of his God, was imitated and equalled by the magicians of that country; for they also brought up frogs, as may be seen by reading the seventh verse. It is rather singular that Jehovah should be placed in competition with a set of Egyptian conjurers, and that the latter should in so many instances exhibit their miraculous operations in a manner equal to the jewish god himself. We often use this epithet because it is descriptive of a national divinity, and because we believe this divinity a very different being from the real God of nature. A more exalted opinion must be formed, a more comprehensive view must be taken of the attributes of the divine creator than that which is contained in the bible, or else the principle of Theism ought to be abandoned altogether. An impotent, a temporizing god,

is no god at all. When this wonderful miracle of the frogs was past it seems that Pharaoh relapsed again into that hard hearted state for which he had always been so remarkable. It is no wonder that this man was so hard hearted, for God it seems by the account, had enlisted himself in the cruel work, and rendered obdurate the moral sensibility of the Egyptian king. The next effort which Jehovah makes for the emancipation of his chosen people, is the manufacturing of a greater number of lice than ever was heard of in any other part of the world, or in all the world beside. In verse 16 and 17, this lousy account may be read. It is there said 'that all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.' What a lousy set they must have been! Can such an extravagant, foolish, uninteresting story be considered as a divine revelation from God himself? Such stuff as this is only a disgrace to the Creator, and ought to be held in contempt by the common sense of mankind. But here it will be said by believers that the power of God was manifest; for it seems by the account that the magicians failed in their efforts to bring forth lice. Perhaps this was owing to the want of materials out of which to make them, for Aron and the Jewish conjurers had used up all the dust of the land in their lousy manufactory, and there was nothing left for the Egyptian conjurers to work upon. But setting aside this consideration, and taking the account as it stands, nothing more can be said than that Aron was the more dextrous jugler, and could play off a better game of deception. In our estimation, however, the whole is a downright lie, because the story is at war with the attributes of God, and the whole account has not in it one single particle of utility.

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The persecuting spirit of Christians of the 12th century, is exemplified in the following extract from the Tablet of Memory, which ought to stimulate every benevolent mind to endeavour to enlighten and liberalize the present and future generations.

"Hereticks, thirty, came from Germany to England:

to propogate their opinions. They ſaid they were Chriſtians, but denied baptiſm, the Lord's ſupper, and matrimony; for which they were condemned by a council of biſhops at Oxford, and delivered over to the ſecular arm. Accordingly they were marked in the forehead with a red hot iron, whipped and thrust out of doors naked in the midst of winter; where, none daring to relieve them, an order having been published to the contrary, they died of hunger and cold 1160."

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## *Profession of faith of a Savoyard Curate, from Rousseau, continued from our last.*

In our endeavours to re-eſtabliſh by medicines a conſtitution impaired by irregularities, we always add to the evil we feel, the greater one which we fear; our apprehenſions of death anticipate its horrors, and haſten its approach. The faſter we endeavour to fly, the ſwifter it purſues us: thus we are terrified as long as we live, and die, murmuring againſt nature, on account of thoſe evils, which we bring on ourſelves by doing outrage to her laws.

Enquire no longer, man, who is the author of evil: behold him in yourſelf. There exists no other evil in nature than what you either do or ſuffer, and you are equally the author of both. A general evil could exist only in diſorder; but, in the ſyſtem of nature, I ſee an eſtabliſhed order, which is never disturbed. Particular evil exists only in the ſentiment of the ſuffering being; and this ſentiment is not given to man by nature, but is of his own acquiſition. Pain and ſorrow have but little hold on thoſe, who, unaccuſtomed to reflection, have neither memory nor foreſight. Take away our fatal improvements, take away our errors and our vices, take away, in ſhort, every thing that is the work of man, and all the reſt is good.

Where every thing is good, nothing can be unjust, juſtice being inſeparable from goodneſs. Now goodneſs is the neceſſary effect of infinite power, and ſelf-love eſ-

ſential to every being conſcious of its existence. An omnipotent Being extends its existence alſo, if I may ſo expreſs myſelf, with that of its creatures. Production and preſervation follow from the constant exertion of its power: it does not act on non-existence. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; he cannot be miſchievous or wicked without hurting himſelf. And being capable of doing every thing, cannot *will* to do any thing but what is good. He who is infinitely good, therefore, becauſe he is infinitely powerful, must alſo be ſupremely just, otherwiſe he would be inconsistent with himſelf: for that love of order which produces it we call goodneſs, and that love of order which preſerves it is called juſtice.

God, it is ſaid, owes nothing to his creatures; for my part, I believe he owes them every thing he promiſed them when he gave them being. Now what is it leſs than to promiſe them a bleſsing, if he gives them an idea of it, and has ſo conſtituted them, as to feel the want of it? The more I look into myſelf, the more plainly I read theſe words written in my ſoul; *Be just, and thou wilt be happy*. I ſee not the truth of this, however, in the preſent state of things, wherein the wicked triumph, and the just are trampled on and oppreſsed. What indignation hence ariſes within us, to find our hopes are frustrated! Conſcience itſelf riſes up and complains of its Maker: it cries out to him, lamenting, *Thou hast deceived me!*

"I have deceived thee! Raſh man! who hath told "thee ſo? Is thy ſoul annihilated? Dost thou ceaſe to "exist?—Oh, Brutus! ſtain not a life of glory in the "end: leave not thy honour and thy hopes with thy bo-"dy in the fields of Philippi. Wherefore dost thou ſay, "Virtue is a ſhadow, when thou art going to enjoy the "reward of thine own? Dost thou imagine thou art go-"ing to die? No, thou art going to live; and then I "will make good every promiſe I have made thee."

One would be apt to think, from the murmurs of impatient mortals, that God owed them a recompence be-

fore they deſerved it; and that he was obliged to reward their virtue beforehand. No, let us be firſt virtuous, and reſt aſſured we ſhall ſooner or later be happy. Let us not require the prize before we have got the victory, nor demand the price of our labour before the work be finiſhed. It is not in the liſts, ſays Plutarch, that the victors, at our games, are crowned, but after the contest is over.

If the ſoul be immaterial, it may ſurvive the body; and if ſo, Providence is juſtified. Had I no other proof of the immateriality of the ſoul, than the oppreſſion of the juſt, and the triumph of the wicked in this world, this alone would prevent my having the leaſt doubt of it. So ſhocking a diſcord amidſt the general harmony of things, would make me naturally look out for the cauſe. I ſhould ſay to myſelf, We do not ceaſe to exiſt with this life; every thing aſſumes its order after death. I ſhould indeed, be embarraſſed to tell where man was to be found, when all his perceptible properties were deſtroyed. At preſent, however, there appears to me no difficulty in this point, as I acknowledge the exiſtence of two different ſubſtances. It is very plain, that during my corporeal life, as I perceive nothing but by means of my ſenſes, whatever is not ſubmitted to their cognizance muſt eſcape me. When the union of the body and the ſoul is broken, I conceive that the one may be diſſolved, and the other preſerved entire. Why ſhould the diſſolution of the one neceſſarily bring on that of the other? On the contrary, being ſo indifferent in their natures, their ſtate of union is a ſtate of violence, and when it is broken, they both return to their natural ſituation: the active and living ſubſtance regains all the force it had employed in giving motion to the paſſive and dead ſubſtance to which it had been united. Alas! my failings makes me but too ſenſible that man is but half alive in this life, and that the life of the ſoul commences at the death of the body.

*But what is that life?* Is the ſoul immortal in its own nature? My limited comprehenſion is incapable of conceiving any thing that is unlimited. Whatever we call

infinite, is beyond my conception. What can I deny, or affirm, what arguments can I employ on a ſubject I cannot conceive? I believe that the ſoul ſurvives the body ſo long as is neceſſary to juſtify Providence in the good order of things; but who knows that this will be for ever? I can readily conceive how material bodies wear away, and are deſtroyed by the ſeparation of their parts; but I cannot conceive a like diſſolution of a thinking being; and hence, as I cannot imagine how it can die, I preſume it cannot die at all. This preſumption, alſo, being conſolatory, and not unreaſonable, why ſhould I be fearful to indulge it?

I feel that I have a ſoul; I know it, both from thought and ſentiment; I know that it exists, without knowing its eſſence: I cannot reaſon, therefore, on ideas which I have not. One thing, indeed, I know very well; which is, that the identity of my being can be preſerved only by the memory, and that to be in fact the ſame perſon, I must remember to have before existed. Now I cannot recollect, after my death, what I was during life, without recollecting alſo my perceptions and conſequently my actions: and I doubt not but this remembrance will one day conſtitute the happineſs of the juſt, and the torments of the wicked. Here below, the violence of our paſſions abſorbs the innate ſentiments of right and wrong, and ſtifles remorſe. The mortification and diſgrace alſo, under which virtue labours in the world, prevents our being ſenſible of its charms; but when delivered from the deluſions of ſenſe, we ſhall enjoy the contemplation of the Supreme Being, and thoſe eternal truths of which he is the whole ſource; when the beauty of the natural order of things ſhall ſtrike all the faculties of the ſoul; and when we ſhall be employed ſolely in comparing what we have really done, with what we ought to have done, then will the voice of conſcience re-aſſume its tone and ſtrength; then will that pure delight, which ariſes from a conſciouſneſs of virtue, and the bitter regret of having debaſed ourſelves by vice, determine the lot which is ſeverally prepared for us. Ask me not, my good friend, if there

may not be ſome other cauſes of future happineſs and miſery. I confeſs I am ignorant: theſe, however, which I conceive, are ſufficient to conſole me under the inconveniences of this life, and give me hopes of another. I do not pretend to ſay that the virtuous will receive any peculiar rewards: for what other advantage can a Being, excellent in its own nature, expect than to exist in a manner agreeable to the excellence of its constitution? I dare affirm, nevertheleſs, that they will be happy; becauſe their Creator, the author of all justice, having given them ſenſibility, cannot have made them to be miſerable; and as they have not abuſed their liberty on earth, they have not perverted the deſign of their creation, by their own fault, yet, as they have ſuffered evils in this life, they will certainly be indemnified in another. This opinion is not ſo much founded on the merits of the man, as on the notion of that goodneſs which appears to me inſeparable from the divine nature. I only ſuppoſe the order of things ſtrictly maintained, and that the Deity is ever conſiſtent with himſelf.

It would be to as little purpoſe to ask me whether the torments of the wicked will be eternal. Of this I am equally as ignorant, and have not the vain curioſity to perplex myſelf with ſuch uſeleſs diſquiſitions. I can never believe, however, that they will be condemned to everlasting torments.

If ſupreme justice avenges itſelf on the wicked, it avenges itſelf on them here below. It is you and your errors, ye nations! that are its miniſters of vengeance. It employs the evils you bring on each other to puniſh the crimes for which you deſerve them.

*To be continued.*

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